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Letter dated 31 January 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to submit herewith a non-paper, compiled as a courtesy by the Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations, summarizing the ideas expressed by the participants in the open debate convened on 10 January 2017 on the subject "Conflict prevention and sustaining peace" (see annex).

I am grateful for your contribution to the open debate. We hope that the summary will serve as inspiration and support for our common efforts to reenergize the fundamental mission of the United Nations to prevent conflict and sustain peace.

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Olof **Skoog**
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative

17-01699 (E) 130217

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Annex to the letter dated 31 January 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Non-paper of the open debate of the Security Council held on 10 January 2017 on the subject "Conflict prevention and sustaining peace"

Introduction

The open debate of the Security Council on the subject "Conflict prevention and sustaining peace", which was held on 10 January 2017, was organized by Sweden as President of the Security Council for the month of January. The meeting was chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden and President of the Security Council, Margot Wallström. The meeting was the first formal opportunity for the newly appointed Secretary-General to meet the members of the Security Council and communicate his vision to the broader United Nations membership.

Over the past two years, a number of normative developments have generated momentum for greater prevention efforts across the United Nations. With the arrival of a new Secretary-General, who has highlighted prevention of conflict as one of his priorities, such developments have the potential to lead to a genuine shift in how the United Nations addresses threats to peace and security. The participants in the open debate sought to identify challenges to conflict prevention and sustaining peace and propose steps to overcome them. The aim was to lay the foundation for a more proactive form of cooperation between the Security Council and the Secretary-General, with a view to enabling more strategic responses.

During the debate, the Secretary-General had the opportunity to outline to the Security Council his vision for restoring trust and putting prevention at the heart of the work of the United Nations. Council members and other Member States had the opportunity to provide political support for that vision and to express their views on how best to maximize the prevention potential of the United Nations. More than 90 countries and regional organizations expressed their support for his vision.

The present non-paper, compiled as a courtesy by the Permanent Mission of Sweden, is a summary of the ideas expressed by the participants during the open debate. It does not represent an endorsement of the proposals and their content by any Member State or participant. A full record of the debate is available on the website of the Security Council (see S/PV.7857).

Vision of the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General used the open debate to lay out his vision for a renewed emphasis on conflict prevention and sustaining peace. He underlined the imperative for greater attention to and investment in prevention activities. He noted that multiple and interconnected drivers of conflict, including social, developmental, economic and environmental, meant that local and national conflicts could easily spread across borders and regions. He said that the United Nations and its partners must reduce fragmentation in their strategies, structures and operations by connecting efforts on peace and security, sustainable development and human rights.

He said that the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the "sustaining peace" resolutions showed intergovernmental support for such an approach and that the reforms that he had put in place were aimed at achieving that.

The Secretary-General stated that the work and the reform of the United Nations development system must be linked with that of the peace and security architecture, with support from the General Assembly and the Security Council. The United Nations should take a "whole-of-organization" approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with the aim of addressing the root causes of conflict. That included carrying out humanitarian activities, building resilience, ensuring the participation of women and girls, ending youth unemployment and investing in inclusive and cohesive societies in which diversity would be seen as an asset rather than a threat.

The Secretary-General called for a "surge in diplomacy for peace" that employed the capacity of all actors. He noted his commitment to increasing the mediation capacity of the United Nations and called upon the Security Council to put the tools already at its disposal to better use. He underlined the central importance of building trust between Member States themselves and in their relations with the United Nations as a prerequisite for the successful prevention of armed conflict. He committed himself to fostering a more trustful and honest relationship with the Council.

Furthermore, the Secretary-General underlined the common interest in putting peace first, noting that the United Nations could respond more swiftly when warning signs emerged by working with regional organizations. War was never inevitable, but a matter of choice, he said, stressing that, likewise, peace was not inevitable, but a result of difficult decisions, hard work and compromise. Therefore, peace could not be taken for granted, but must be the priority for all.

Challenges to sustaining peace

While it was recognized that the main responsibility for conflict prevention and sustaining peace lay with Member States, there was broad and strong support for the call by the Secretary-General to put prevention at the heart of the work of the United Nations. Nevertheless, Member States also acknowledged challenges to the achievement of that goal, as outlined below.

New nature of threats and challenges

Member States agreed with the Secretary-General that today's crises were driven by a range of complex and interconnected causes, such as social, economic, gender, ethnic, religious and ideological issues and environmental degradation, including climate change. The nexus between poverty, human rights and security was identified as a crucial driver of conflict, which needed to be addressed in an integrated fashion to enable the development of peaceful societies.

In addition, the transboundary nature of modern conflicts and the existence of multiple, often interrelated conflicts or areas of instability have posed challenges to the ability of the United Nations to mount responses. Similarly, conflicts driven by violent extremism and carried out through acts of terrorism, usually directed towards the most vulnerable, need new approaches and responses.

Fragmentation within the United Nations system

Member States identified fragmentation and lack of coordination across the United Nations system as major barriers to effective conflict prevention. They noted the continued presence of institutional silos preventing the system from working coherently to address the root causes of conflict, such as a lack of development, human rights violations and competition for resources.

Member States also identified a lack of coherence across the major organs of the United Nations, namely, the Secretariat, the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, as well as with agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system.

Role of the Security Council

Member States underlined that the Security Council had the tools required to enhance the prevention of armed conflict but did not use them sufficiently. Several speakers noted that the Council sometimes failed to react to warnings because of a lack of political will or other political considerations, instead responding only when conflicts were already under way. A number of speakers underlined the need for Council reform, and several questioned the use of the veto in situations involving gross violations of human rights.

Member States noted that political rather than military solutions were needed to sustain peace. They questioned whether peacekeeping and special mission mandates were sufficiently flexible to allow for activities relating to sustaining peace and conflict prevention. Several Member States underlined the meagre levels of funding available for such activities, noting that the cost of peacekeeping operations was immense in comparison.

Policy recommendations

Member States called for a new political consensus on prevention. The rich discussion yielded a range of policy recommendations in support of the efforts of the Secretary-General to rebalance the approach of the United Nations to peace and security.

Role of the United Nations, the Secretariat and the United Nations system

Member States emphasized the need for an open and mutually reinforcing relationship between the Secretary-General and the Security Council. They urged the Secretary-General to use his powers under the Charter of the United Nations to bring issues to the attention of the Security Council at an early stage. They called upon him to provide honest assessments based on rigorous analysis to the Council and to tell its members what they needed to know, not only what they wanted to hear, which should lead to increased situational awareness and more horizon-scanning meetings with the Council. Such assessments should draw upon analysis from across the United Nations system, pointing to the need for enhanced capacity for integrated analysis and planning, as well as early warning capacity. The need for increased capacity to analyse and manage risks from emerging threats, including the effects of climate change, was also raised. The Secretary-General was encouraged to increase the use of his good offices as a form of preventive diplomacy.

Many Member States welcomed the efforts of the Secretary-General to increase coordination across the Organization and encouraged him to continue to take forward structural reform. The priority for the entire United Nations system should be prevention and addressing the root causes of conflict. Member States underlined the need for coordination across all three pillars of the system, from the field level to Headquarters. They also encouraged better collaboration between the Security Council, as well as other United Nations organs, and the Peacebuilding Commission, which could be a valuable source of information for the Council's deliberations and help to build coherence within the United Nations system.

Member States welcomed the comprehensive peace reviews conducted in 2015 and their focus on prevention across all stages of conflict. Such an approach involved moving from the idea of conflict management to a focus on prevention and tackling the root causes of conflict, which would include ensuring adequate and predictable funding for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, including through the achievement of a better balance between peacekeeping and prevention in budgets.

Role of the Security Council

The Security Council was encouraged to use existing tools for the prevention of armed conflict to better effect, including through greater use of Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter. Speakers underlined the importance of mediation and encouraged greater investment therein. Numerous speakers underlined the role of regional and subregional organizations in sustaining peace and encouraged greater partnership and collaboration between the United Nations and such organizations.

A number of Member States, while recognizing the need for national leadership, called upon the Security Council to act consistently, including with regard to respect for national sovereignty. It was noted that, if the Secretary-General used his prerogative under Article 99 to bring matters to the attention of the Council, the members of the Council must show the political will to respond.

Recalling the outcome of the reviews conducted in 2015, Member States encouraged the Council to consider the mandates of peacekeeping and special missions and ensure that prevention was well reflected therein. Member States emphasized that one size did not fit all and that mandates must be tailored to particular contexts. The need for transitional justice as a means of preventing a return to conflict was also mentioned.

Role of Member States

Member States emphasized that the main responsibility for ending conflicts lay with States themselves. Many speakers underlined the fact that development and human rights were central to sustaining peace. Recognizing the need to address the root causes of instability and conflict, Member States emphasized the need for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Taken together with the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on sustaining peace, the 2030 Agenda was the basis for systematic and structural prevention.

Many speakers underlined the need for "whole-of-society" approaches to sustaining peace. All stakeholders must be active partners in building peaceful and sustainable societies. Speakers underlined the important role that religious and

traditional leaders could play in preventing conflict. They also identified the important role of women, including as mediators, in preventing conflict and delivering lasting peace and encouraged the Secretary-General to pay particular attention thereto. The role of young people in building sustainable peace was also emphasized.

Conclusion

During the open debate, Member States and the United Nations reaffirmed their strong commitment to prevention. The need for the Secretary-General and the Security Council, working with the rest of the United Nations system, Member States and regional organizations, to utilize existing tools for preventive diplomacy and to embed prevention across the United Nations system was emphasized.

The interconnected nature of the challenges facing the world, which were leading to more complex conflicts, was underlined. To prevent such conflicts from emerging, the United Nations and its partners must address the drivers and root causes thereof, which requires an integrated approach that brings together peace and security, sustainable development and human rights. A proactive United Nations structure that abandons silos in favour of coordinated and integrated ways of working is needed.

That Member States bore the primary responsibility for protecting their populations and preventing conflict was underscored. However, the capacity of the United Nations for early action in identifying and responding to emerging conflicts should be enhanced. A trusting and open relationship between the Secretary-General and the Security Council can be a strong base upon which to build a United Nations that has prevention at the heart of its work.